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SUBJECT: Guyana Snares Cuban Medical Aid And Scholarships

1. President Jagdeo returned from a two-day visit to Cuba and held a press conference to trumpet several pledges of assistance, including the establishment of an ophthalmology clinic and a scholarship program for Guyanese students to study medicine, agriculture and engineering in Cuba. The eye clinic, to be established in the hospital in the eastern Berbice Region city of Port Mourant, will be staffed by Cuban physicians and will provide up to 10,000 eye surgeries per year free of charge.

2. Castro has also offered to fund 965 scholarships for Guyanese students to study in Cuba, including 715 scholarships over the next 5 years to study medicine and 250 for agriculture and engineering. Guyana currently has some 300 students studying in Cuba, 70 of which are studying medicine. Cuba is also exploring the possibility of supplying instructors to train nurses. Castro's offers will not come without cost for Guyana, as Guyana was reportedly asked to earmark US\$1.2 million to finance the purchase of equipment for four treatment centers to be established in Guyana and staffed by 27 Cuban physicians. In addition, while Cuba will pay the doctors' salaries, Guyana will fund accommodation and stipends for the doctors in the amount of GD40,000 (USD199) per month.

3. Jagdeo demurred from questions about the West's response to his courtship of the Castro regime, as the government-owned Guyana Chronicle reported that "[Jagdeo] added that he does not make decisions based on who would be comfortable but on the needs of the people to whom he has an obligation." A government press release entitled "Would Cuba aid affect Guyana/US relations" issued on February 6 stated that Jagdeo and Castro did not discuss politics and quoted Jagdeo as saying "We have many common views on how our countries should develop, but our countries are different and the model practiced in Cuba, would be different from the model practiced in Guyana. You already know where I want to take this country and that includes private capital playing a very important part."

4. COMMENT: Politics aside, Post questions the sustainability of Cuba's programs to train Guyanese medical professionals. The GOG typically waives migration restrictions on trained professionals when their immigration petitions become current, suggesting that such programs in the long run will not noticeably check the "brain drain" of skilled professionals. The Cubans' involvement in laboratory matters also comes as a surprise, for the Guyana and the regional Caribbean plans for lab services do not appear to include any mention of such a plan. The public relations impact of such a program, however, is evident from the sizable media coverage of Cuba's efforts. The Cubans are receiving the kind of press that will help them win the hearts and minds of the Guyanese. Each time Cuban doctors come to Guyana to provide eye treatment, they receive front page headlines in the three major daily newspapers. This contrasts greatly with the efforts of TDY U.S. military physicians and the Mission's PEPFAR initiatives taken in country which are often relegated to less noticeable sections of the newspapers.

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